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RHMFIUU/CJTF HOA IMMEDIATE
RUZEFAA/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE IMMEDIATE
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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - DISPUTED NORTHERN REGION'S CLANSMEN
DECLARE SELF-ADMINISTRATION

¶1. Summary. Leaders of a newly-declared Sol/Sanaag/Ayn (S/S/A) regional administration, including an American citizen, have called on us to explain their Dhulbahante clan's grievances against the Somaliland administration, and their political vision for extricating themselves from Somaliland's authority. They will travel to S/S/A from Nairobi in mid-November, against the backdrop of a November 1 roadside bomb that killed a Somaliland official in the region. The Dhulbahante leaders condemned the attack, and denied knowledge of the group that carried it out. A Somaliland government contact called us to discredit the self-declared leaders. End Summary.

¶2. Leaders of a newly-declared Sol/Sanaag/Ayn (S/S/A) regional administration have called on us to explain their grievances against the Somaliland administration, and their political vision for extricating themselves from Somaliland's authority. The movement is made up of Darood/Dhulbahante and many of its senior leaders are from the North American-based Somali diaspora. The S/S/A administration announced itself after a large conference in Nairobi, and claims to represent a large majority of Dhulbahante in the region. It is unclear to us what support these self-proclaimed officials have in the S/S/A region, but we believe their views likely represent those of many Dhulbahante citizens in S/S/A that resent Somaliland's presence in the region. The senior leaders, including an American citizen, Soulieman Ahmed, and two Canadians, plan to go to S/S/A on/about November 11.

¶3. A faction of the Darod/Dhulbahante clan in Sol/Sanaag/Ayn have long chafed under Isaaq-clan dominated Somaliland's claims of authority over their homeland. (Note: Ayn is a district of the Togdheer region. End Note). When Somaliland declared independence in 1991, it based its borders on the colonial boundaries of British Somaliland, which included S/S/A. Multiple Hargeisa administrations have, therefore, insisted that S/S/A remain part of Somaliland and have struggled to retain control of the regions. Complicating this picture was the 1998 formation of the semi-autonomous Puntland administration and the subsequent conflict between Somaliland and Puntland over parts of Sol and Sanaag. Over the years the contested areas of Sol and Sanaag have many times changed hands between Somaliland and Puntland, including most recently in 2007 when Somaliland captured the strategic town of Las Aanod. There are Dhulbahante on both sides of the Somaliland-Puntland border. Dhulbahante loyalty is, therefore, split among Somaliland, Puntland, and the new administration pledging loyalty to the TFG.

¶4. The Sol/Sanaag/Ayn leadership detailed their grievances

against the Somaliland government. They blame Somaliland for militarizing the region by capturing the area from Puntland in 2007. Since the region is now disputed, S/S/A leaders claim humanitarian organizations no longer feel safe operating there, compounding the suffering of their Dhulbahante clansmen. The Somaliland administration, they claim, uses rival Isaaq clan militia to represent them militarily, inflaming local clan sensitivities. The Isaaq clan proxies have forcibly disarmed the Dhulbahante causing concerns about the clan's security.

¶5. The new S/S/A leadership explained their political vision. They are hopeful the formation of a new administration will change the political dialogue with the Somaliland and Puntland governments. By forming an independent administration, they hope to de-link their population from the Somaliland-Puntland conflict and strengthen the hand of their independence-minded elders and clan leaders. As expected, given their animosity toward secessionist Somaliland, the S/S/A leaders emphasized their support for a unified Somalia, under a federal government based in Mogadishu. They claimed to have met Somali Prime Minister Omar Sharif and received his blessing. They conceded that there are some Dhulbahante that are loyal to Somaliland or Puntland, but they claimed to represent the will of Dhulbahante majority.

¶6. Comment: Throughout our discussions with the new Dhulbahante leaders, we emphasized the need for peaceful dialogue with Somaliland authorities. On November 1 a Somaliland official was murdered by a roadside bomb in Sanaag

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province. On November 3 Somaliland troops attempted but failed to arrest the man claiming responsibility for the attack, prompting a gun battle and spontaneous anti-Somaliland demonstrations by citizens in Buuhoodle, Togdheer region, according to media reports. The Dhulbahante leaders have publicly condemned the attack and the assassin, a former Puntland minister who is rumored to be mentally ill.

¶7. Comment, cont.: The Dhulbahante leaders are concerned about Somaliland's reaction when they travel to S/S/A on/about November 11. In fact, a senior Somaliland government contact in the Information Ministry has contacted us to discredit the group. We again urged Somaliland react with peaceful dialogue. We have advised the American Dhulbahante leader not to travel to S/S/A if he believes he will be in danger. We've also advised him we cannot reliably render consular services in Somaliland. Somaliland will almost certainly refuse to let the regions go because Hargeisa views its territorial claims as justification for independence. A second Somaliland contact told us Somaliland is amassing troops in the area in response to perceived threats from Puntland. We will continue to monitor the situation. End comment.

RANNEBERGER